

**PRELIMINARY
RECOMMENDATIONS
BOARD OF GAME PROPOSALS**

November 2003

Alaska Department of Fish & Game

Division of Wildlife Conservation

The department's recommendations are based on analysis of the proposals with available information. These recommendations may change after further analysis based on public comment or additional information.

PROPOSAL 1

EFFECT OF THE PROPOSAL: This proposal would change the resident and nonresident moose seasons in Unit 18 by:

- 1) Lengthening the resident season 9 days in portions of the unit to make a uniform season from Sept 1-Sept 30 throughout the unit;
- 2) Creating a new boundary in Unit 18 to define the area with no nonresident hunting. The new boundary would be 'a line from the mouth of the Ishkowiik River to the closest point of Dall Lake then to the easternmost point of Takslesluk Lake then along the Kuskokwim River drainage boundary to the Unit 18 border. The nonresident closed area south and east of the new boundary line is the same area as the moose hunting moratorium within the Kuskokwim River drainage outlined in Proposal 2.
- 3) Lengthening the nonresident season 9 days to make the season the same as the resident season in the portion of Unit 18 where nonresident hunting is retained. The nonresident season would be Sept 1-Sept 30 in the area north and westerly of a line from the mouth of the Ishkowiik River to the closest point of Dall Lake then to the easternmost point of Takslesluk Lake then along the Kuskokwim River drainage boundary to the Unit 18 border.

DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION: **Adopt**

RATIONALE: Staff proposal-see issue statement.

PROPOSAL 2

EFFECT OF THE PROPOSAL: This proposal would close moose hunting easterly of a line from the mouth of the Ishkowiik River to the closest point of Dall Lake then to the easternmost point of Takslesluk Lake then along the Kuskokwim River drainage boundary to the Unit 18 border and north of and including the Eek River drainage.

DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION: **Adopt**

RATIONALE: This proposal was submitted by the Lower Kuskokwim Advisory Committee, the Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge, and Department staff. See issue statement.

This change would reduce the geographic area for subsistence moose hunting in Unit 18. The Board has identified a positive customary and traditional use finding for moose in Unit 18, indicating that 80-100 moose are needed to satisfy subsistence needs. The Board should ensure that the amount needed for subsistence within the unit will continue to be met if this proposal is adopted.

PROPOSAL 3

EFFECT OF THE PROPOSAL: This proposal would make the resident caribou season and bag limit the same throughout the unit and shorten the nonresident season 1 day by closing the season on Sept 30 instead of Oct 1. The unit-wide resident season would be Aug 1-Apr 15 and the unit-wide resident bag limit would be 5 caribou.

DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION: **Adopt**

RATIONALE: This proposal was submitted by the Orutsararmiut Native Council and the Department. See issue statement.

PROPOSAL 4

EFFECT OF THE PROPOSAL: The current general resident and nonresident brown bear seasons in Unit 18 are Sept 10 – Oct 10 and May 10 – May 25. This proposal would extend these seasons to a single Sept 1 – May 31 season for both residents and nonresidents.

DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION: **Amend and Adopt**

RATIONALE: Staff proposal-see issue statement. Also, amend this proposal to change the resident and nonresident bag limits to one bear per year that does not count against the one bear per 4 year bag limits found elsewhere. This change would provide additional brown bear hunting opportunity, is not expected to result in significant additional harvest, and has the added benefit of simplifying the regulations.

PROPOSAL 5

EFFECT OF THE PROPOSAL: This proposal would extend the brown bear general season and change bag limit by lengthening the fall season 9 days (changing from Sept 10-Oct 10 to Sept 1-Oct 10), lengthening the spring season 21 days (changing from May 10-May 25 to Apr 15-May 31), and changing the bag limit to one bear per year. These changes would apply to both resident and nonresident hunters.

DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION: **Take No Action**

RATIONALE: Based on recommendations in Proposal 4, there is no need to take action on this proposal.

PROPOSAL 6

EFFECT OF THE PROPOSAL: This proposal would allow the use of snowmachines to take wolves in Unit 18 in the same fashion that wolves are currently allowed to be taken in adjacent Unit 19.

DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION: **No Recommendation**

RATIONALE: This proposal was jointly authored by the Lower Kuskokwim AC and the Lower Yukon AC.

In recent years, wolf populations have increased in Unit 18 despite liberal take regulations. The population increases are likely linked to the increased availability of Mulchatna caribou in the Kilbuck Mountains and an increase in the moose population along the Yukon River. If adopted, this proposal will not pose a population-based concern for the wolf populations in Unit 18. Wolf harvest has increased in recent years in response to population increases and this proposed regulation is not expected to further increase harvest.

There is regional support from many wildlife users to allow the use of snowmachines as an aid in taking wolves. Yet, this area has not been identified through the Board process associated with a Wolf Predation Control Implementation Plan (5 AAC 92.125). The department has historically recommended liberalizing seasons and bag limits first to provide additional opportunity for desired harvest-level outcome, before relaxing methods and means regulations. The department is concerned that allowing this practice outside of specifically adopted predation control areas could compromise its use in the predation control areas.

In the Kuskokwim River drainage, the department has gained considerable broad-based support for a moose management strategy that includes a 5-yr moratorium on moose hunting (see Proposal 2) as a method to increase local populations. Some support for this strategy has been contingent on the department supporting liberal wolf harvest regulations because wolf predation is recognized as being a detriment to moose population expansion.

PROPOSAL 7

EFFECT OF THE PROPOSAL: This proposal would require hunters to leave moose and caribou meat on the bones of the front and hindquarters throughout Unit 18. Currently this requirement exists south of the Yukon River in Unit 18 and in several adjacent subunits.

DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION: **Adopt**

RATIONALE: Staff proposal-see issue statement.

PROPOSAL 8

EFFECT OF THE PROPOSAL: This proposal changes moose regulations in Unit 22(A) by:

- 1) creating three hunt areas with differing seasons and bag limits;

- 2) shortening the resident moose season throughout the unit;
- 3) eliminating the nonresident season north of the Golsovia River drainage; and
- 4) changing the bag limit to one antlered moose throughout the unit.

There is an error in the published proposal. South of the Golsovia River drainage the Advisory Committee intended to shorten the resident winter season to Dec. 1–Dec. 31.

DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION: **Amend and Adopt**

RATIONALE: Department census and survey data indicate a significant decline in the Unit 22(A) moose population, particularly in the portion of Unit 22(A) north of the Golsovia River drainage and south of Junction Creek. The population status of moose and traditional moose hunting seasons vary greatly between different parts of the unit, thus different regulations are justified in different areas. We recommend adopting the resident seasons presented in the proposal and amending: 1) hunt area descriptions, 2) resident bag limit, 3) nonresident seasons, and 4) nonresident bag limits, as follows:

- 1) Redefine the 3 hunt areas with the following seasons and bag limits:
 - Unit 22(A), that portion north of and including the Tagoomenik and Shaktoolik River drainages;
 - 1) Resident Season: Aug. 1-Sept. 30 with bag limit: 1 antlered bull
 - 2) Nonresident season: Sept. 1-Sept. 14 with bag limit: 1 bull with 50-inch antlers or antlers with 4 or more brow tines on one side
 - Unit 22(A), that portion in the Unalakleet drainage and all drainages flowing into Norton Sound north of the Golsovia drainage and south of the Tagoomenik and Shaktoolik drainages; and
 - 1) Resident Season: Aug. 15-Sept. 30 with bag limit: 1 antlered bull
 - 2) No nonresident season
 - Remainder of Unit 22(A).
 - 1) Resident Season: Aug. 1-Sept. 30; Dec. 1-Dec. 31 with bag limit: 1 antlered bull
 - 2) Nonresident season: Sept. 5-Sept. 25 with bag limit: 1 bull with 50-inch antlers or antlers with 4 or more brow tines on one side
- 2) Change the resident bag limit designation to ‘antlered bull’ throughout the unit.
- 3) Provide a nonresident season (Sept. 1-Sept. 14) in the northern portion of the unit; Close nonresident hunting in the central portion of the unit; Change the nonresident season in the southern portion of the unit to Sept. 5-Sept. 25 to match the season in adjoining Yukon River drainage (Units 21(D) and 21(E))
- 4) Retain the existing nonresident bag limit in the northern and southern portions of the unit. The bag limit would be 1 bull with 50-inch antlers or antlers with 4 or more brow tines on one side

In Unit 22(A) north of the Golsovia River drainage, the Dec.1 –Jan. 31 resident season would be eliminated. Although there has been little winter moose harvest in recent years, removing the winter season will protect the vulnerable winter population, especially when caribou are not present and demand for moose increases. In the central portion of the unit, which includes the Unalakleet River drainage (second area described above),

resident demand and harvest exceeds the available harvest and we agree that nonresident hunting should be eliminated and resident seasons should be shortened as proposed. In the northern portion of the unit, resident demand and harvest is lower and we recommend amending the proposal to allow nonresident hunting with a large bull bag limit during Sept. 1-Sept. 14.

In the southern portion of the unit (Remainder of Unit 22(A)), we believe the moose population is less depressed and recruitment rates are significantly higher than in other portions of the unit. Less restrictive changes are needed and we recommend adopting the split resident season as proposed and amending the nonresident season by shortening it to Sept 5-Sept 25 to match the season in the adjoining Yukon River area.

We recommend amending the bag limits in the proposal. To be consistent with other moose regulations in Unit 22, we recommend changing the resident bag limit designation to 'antlered bull'. This will help combat the problem of accidental and illegal cow harvest that might occur during the winter season in this area. We recommend amending the nonresident bag limit by retaining the existing bag limit for large bulls (50-inch antlers or antlers with 4 or more brow tines on one side) and applying this to the areas where nonresident hunting is recommended.

These changes would reduce seasons and bag limits for subsistence. If the Board adopts these reductions, then the Board will need to determine that these reduced seasons and bag limits still provide a reasonable opportunity for subsistence.

PROPOSAL 9

EFFECT OF THE PROPOSAL: This proposal would shorten the nonresident moose season in Unit 22(A) from Aug.1-Sept. 30 to Sept. 1-Sept. 30.

DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION: **Take No Action**

RATIONALE: The recommended nonresident moose season in Unit 22(A) is considered in Proposal 8. Overall, nonresident moose harvest in Unit 22(A) has increased in recent years, while moose populations and resident harvest have declined. Proposal 8 recommends no nonresident season north of the Golsovia River drainage where residents are harvesting more moose than the can be supported by the declining population. In the portion of Unit 22(A) south of and including the Golsovia drainage Proposal 8 recommends an amended season from Sept. 5-Sept.25 which matches the nonresident season in the adjoining units on the Yukon.

PROPOSAL 10

EFFECT OF THE PROPOSAL: This proposal changes the 'to be announced' winter season to a regular winter season by registration permit for bull moose in the Remainder of Unit 22(B).

DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION: **Adopt**

RATIONALE: Staff proposal-see issue statement.

PROPOSAL 11

EFFECT OF THE PROPOSAL: This proposal would close nonresident moose seasons in Unit 22(B), Unit 22(C), and Unit 22(D).

DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION: **Amend and Adopt**

RATIONALE: In 2001 nonresident moose seasons were closed in two portions of Unit 22 in response to declining moose populations and decreasing resident harvest opportunities. Nonresident seasons were eliminated in Unit 22(B) west of the Darby Mountains and in Unit 22(D) in the Kuzitrin drainage; whereas, nonresident seasons were retained in Unit 22(B) east of the Darby Mountains, Unit 22(C) and the remainder of Unit 22(D).

Moose population and harvest data do not support closing nonresident moose seasons in Units 22(B) east and Unit 22(C). In these areas, the nonresident bag limit is restrictive, hunter effort is low, and few moose are harvested annually. There are few user conflict issues and the department recommends retaining the existing nonresident seasons in these areas.

In recent years, data suggests hunter effort and harvest have increased in Unit 22(D) Remainder due to moose population declines and more restrictive moose regulations in other areas of Unit 22. To reduce nonresident hunting pressure in this area the department recommends amending the proposal by establishing a drawing hunt for nonresidents with no change to the season and bag limit. We recommend a drawing permit hunt with up to 10 permits issued annually.

PROPOSAL 12

EFFECT OF THE PROPOSAL: This proposal would establish a registration hunt for bull moose in Unit 22(C).

DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION: **Adopt**

RATIONALE: Staff proposal-see issue statement.

PROPOSAL 13

EFFECT OF THE PROPOSAL: This proposal changes muskox regulations in Units 22 and 23 Southwest by:

- 1) eliminating cow muskox bag limits in Units 22(D), 22(E) and 23 Southwest;

- 2) reducing the harvest quota of bull muskoxen in Unit 22(D), excluding 22(D) Southwest, to 30 bulls; and
- 3) reducing the harvest quota of bull muskoxen in Unit 22(E) to 40 bulls.

DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION: **Do Not Adopt**

RATIONALE: Current harvest rates and bag limits for muskoxen were established by the Board based on recommendations from the Seward Peninsula Muskox Cooperators, a stakeholder group representing public and agency interests and viewpoints. The department's management policies are consistent with the goals of the Seward Peninsula Cooperative Muskox Management Plan, including management for population growth and range expansion. Based on censuses in 2000 and 2002, the population has experienced 7% annual growth rate and 17.5% recruitment in 2002. Also, range expansion has been documented through the occurrence of large mixed age/sex groups in areas east of the Seward Peninsula.

In Units 22(D) and 23 Southwest, a 5% harvest rate is allowed, including a 2% harvest of cows. In Unit 22(E) an 8% harvest rate is allowed, including a 4% harvest of cows. Only in Unit 22(E) has actual cow harvest approached the allowable cow harvest. The harvest limits published in the regulation are higher than current allowable harvests to enable increasing harvest as the population grows.

This proposal was not supported by the Seward Peninsula Muskox Cooperators Group meeting in Nome on September 24, 2003.

PROPOSAL 14

EFFECT OF THE PROPOSAL: This proposal would change both hunting and trapping seasons and both bag limits for beavers in Unit 22 to 'no closed season' and 'no bag limit'.

DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION: **Amend and Adopt**

RATIONALE: Beavers are currently abundant in Unit 22 and harvest data indicate annual harvests are low. We recommend amending the proposal by:

1. opening the trapping season one month earlier on Oct. 1 (season: Oct 1-June 10) with no change to the bag limit of 50 beaver per year; and
2. allowing year-round hunting (as proposed) with an increased bag limit of 50 beaver per year (same as trapping bag limit).

These amendments reduce conflicts associated with summer trapping of beaver (poor hide quality, trapping non-target species), yet allow hunting during the period June 11-July 31 for the small number of people wanting to harvest beaver during the summer. The proposed year-round hunting season would match the season in adjoining Units 18 and 23. The combined hunting and trapping season changes in Unit 22 are expected to have

little effect on the population because beavers are abundant and overall harvest will remain low.

In some parts of northwest Alaska, beaver are commonly used for food. Food-use appears to be less common in Unit 22, perhaps because beaver only recently have become available as the population expands westward on the Seward Peninsula. Use has been reported in Unit 22A and was documented by a 1989 survey in Golovin. However, subsistence surveys have not documented use in Brevig Mission, Wales, and Shishmaref, which are located further west on the peninsula.

PROPOSAL 15

EFFECT OF THE PROPOSAL: This proposal would make 4 changes to moose regulations in Unit 23:

1. Shorten the resident antlered moose season 3 months by closing the season during January-March throughout the Unit.
2. Shorten the resident antlerless moose season 6 months in most of the Unit.
3. Establish a drawing permit hunt for nonresident hunters throughout the Unit.
4. Make moose hunting regulations in the Noatak drainage consistent with most of the rest of Unit 23.

DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION: **Amend and Adopt**

RATIONALE: This proposal was submitted by Advisory Committees in Unit 23 and the Department - see issue statement. We recommend amending this proposal to increase the upper limit on nonresident permits to 125. This is approximately 75% of the 5-yr mean number of nonresident hunters who have reported hunting in Unit 23 since 1998-1999. Increasing this limit will provide the Department more flexibility to adjust the number of permits to changes in moose abundance and hunter trends.

PROPOSAL 16

EFFECT OF THE PROPOSAL: This proposal would shorten the resident moose season and bag limit in the southwest portion of Unit 23.

DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION: **Take No Action**

RATIONALE: See Proposal 15.

PROPOSAL 17

EFFECT OF THE PROPOSAL: This proposal would increase the caribou bag limit in Unit 23 to 10 caribou/day.

DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION: **Adopt**

RATIONALE: This proposal was submitted by Advisory Committees in Unit 23 and the Department - see issue statement. A similar proposal is being submitted to the Federal Subsistence Board to reduce the federal bag limit from 15 to 10 caribou/day in Unit 23. Both proposals attempt to make state and federal caribou bag limits consistent throughout the unit. There is no biological reason to not make this change.

PROPOSAL 18

EFFECT OF THE PROPOSAL: This proposal would increase the number of nonresident brown bear drawing permits by 10 and remove restrictive sealing requirements for brown bears taken in Unit 23.

DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION: **Adopt**

RATIONALE: This proposal was submitted by Advisory Committees in Unit 23 and the Department - see issue statement.

PROPOSAL 19

EFFECT OF THE PROPOSAL: This proposal would eliminate the resident brown bear tag requirement throughout Unit 23.

DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION: **Do Not Adopt**

RATIONALE: This proposal, from Advisory Committees in Unit 23, attempts to liberalize brown bear regulations in Unit 23 by removing the resident tag fee requirement because local residents report bears are 1) damaging their camps, 2) threatening people during subsistence activities (e.g. berry picking), and 3) reducing recruitment of moose by preying on calves.

The department recommends using general season tag fee reductions only in areas identified with predator control implementation plans and Unit 23 has not been identified by the Board as a predator control area. Although moose numbers have been declining in recent years, the Intensive Management population and harvest objectives identified in 5 AAC 92.110 are currently being met in Unit 23. The department is concerned that allowing this practice outside of specifically adopted predation control areas could compromise its use in the predation control areas.

We recommend retaining the existing resident tag fee in Unit 23 with additional gradual liberalization of brown bear regulations, such as increasing the number of drawing permits (see Proposal 18).

PROPOSAL 20

EFFECT OF THE PROPOSAL: This proposal would increase the hunting bag limit for wolves in Unit 23.

DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION: **Amend and adopt.**

RATIONALE: We recommend amending this proposal to establish a 20-wolves per season bag limit instead of a daily bag limit of 10 wolves per day. This will increase opportunities to harvest wolves in Unit 23. Wolf numbers have increased throughout most of the unit and they are capable of sustaining higher harvest levels. Wolves are highly valued by local hunters for their fur and for the prestige associated with taking wolves.

PROPOSAL 21

EFFECT OF THE PROPOSAL: This proposal would lengthen the trapping season for mink and weasel throughout Unit 23.

DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION: **Adopt**

RATIONALE: This proposal was submitted by Advisory Committees in Unit 23 and the Department - see issue statement.

PROPOSAL 22

EFFECT OF THE PROPOSAL: This proposal would establish no closed season and no bag limit for trapping muskrats in Unit 23.

DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION: **Adopt**

RATIONALE: Muskrats taken in Unit 23 are used for their meat as well as their fur. Muskrat harvest patterns and uses are similar to those for beavers which have no closed season and no bag limit. This proposed change, besides providing for increased opportunity to take muskrats in a manner consistent with traditional practices, would simplify trapping regulations. There is no biological reason to oppose this proposal.

PROPOSAL 23

EFFECT OF THE PROPOSAL: This proposal adds a summer moose season in Northwestern Unit 26A and extends the aircraft restriction for moose hunting in Unit 26A Controlled Use area.

DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION: **Adopt**

RATIONALE: This proposal was submitted by the North Slope Borough Fish and Game Management Committee and the Department - see issue statement.

PROPOSAL 24

EFFECT OF THE PROPOSAL: This proposal changes the brown bear bag limit in Unit 26A to 'does not count' against the one bear per 4-year bag limit in other areas.

DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION: **Adopt**

RATIONALE: Staff proposal-see issue statement
